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Balad el-Zibl  (Country of Rubbish): Moral Geographies of Waste in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

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Abstract: Waste sullies, physically and morally, polluting people and places, and defining or altering their position within social and spatial hierarchies. Given this polluting quality and the moral charge of the idiom of pollution, waste and its distribution are indicative of how places are imbued with moral judgment and at the same time waste illustrates how places themselves can become morally polluting. In the context of a waste crisis that followed the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, it is argued here that an attention to waste as material and symbolic category demonstrates the recursive relationship between materials, people, their thoughts and actions, in the moralisation of place. Examining this waste crisis in terms of a Tunisian moral geography of waste, which was established under colonialism and labels certain people and places as clean and dirty, reveals the dynamic and historically-contingent nature of moral spaces and depicts them as sites for socio-spatial struggles that in themselves illuminate the revolution in novel ways. Finally, it is concluded that the polluting quality of waste spilled over the boundaries of Tunisia's moral geography to morally sully the whole time period and political process of Tunisia's transition.

Keywords: waste; morality; place; inequality; revolution

The Tunisian revolution of 2011 was ushered in by waste. A garbage strike in the earliest days of the revolution flooded all major cities with refuse, which exposed and in part created a larger waste management crisis that had been festering under Tunisia's dictatorships for decades (Darwish 2017). The crisis only intensified during the political Transition (2012-2014) that followed the revolution, as it was characterized by a general environment of lawlessness perpetuated by the retreat of the state. At least four consecutive garbage strikes, the closure of landfills and waste-management stations by civil force under the not-in-my-backyard logic, and large scale dumping by Tunisia's waste management authorities, industries and citizens made waste ubiquitous. Waste thus became a central symbol through which the revolution and its aftermath was experienced and morally assessed.

Waste¹ pollutes morally and materially. It inserts people and places into socio-spatial hierarchies and is therefore integral to the moralization of space and place. At the same time, waste illustrates how people, matter and place itself can become morally polluting. Examining Tunisia's waste crisis in terms of a Tunisian moral geography² of waste that labels certain people and places as clean and dirty reveals the dynamic and historically contingent nature of moral spaces and depicts them as a site for socio-spatial struggles that illuminate the revolutions as a process of socio-spatial reordering in novel ways. Moral geographies can therefore define how particular places are imbued with moral judgment and specifically indicate the difference and inequalities that presuppose this judgment.

The protests that swept Tunisia in December 2010 were themselves fuelled by moral indignation and socio-spatial inequalities³ (Belhedi 2012; Zemni 2011). Protesters demanded social and economic justice, an end to political repression, widespread unemployment, poverty, corruption and the profligacy of Ben Ali and his cronies. Initially it was a revolution of the *zawali*, Tunisia's rural and urban poor, whose lives were marred by social, spatial and economic stagnation as well as pollution, despite Tunisia's high development indicators. It was sparked by the desperate self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizzi, a fruit-seller from the rural town of Sidi Bouzid who had been harassed and whose livelihood had been confiscated by local police over an unpaid bribe on December 18th 2010. Following Bouzizzi's death protests spread from smaller towns in the interior to larger cities with the help of social media. In each locality the regime responded with repression and police brutality, leaving more than 330 protesters dead, but fuelling the ever-increasing cry "the people demand the downfall of the regime" (*Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam*). Protests that had started among the

¹ Waste in the Tunisian Arabic dialect is most commonly referred to as *masikh*, dirt, and not as *fadallat*, a more technical term for waste employed by waste management agencies for example. Waste and dirt, despite having different but overlapping theoretical trajectories (see Reno 2015 for an overview) are used here interchangeably as both material entities and symbolic categories with high moral charge. This moral charge is even more clearly expressed in the idiom of *khaamij*, which in that mirrors the English word 'filthy'.

² Lee and Smith (2004, 6) define "moral geographies ('landscapes' or 'locations') as a rubric for a distinctive kind of thick descriptive ethics". This view not only sees moralities as materially and spatially situated, which is essential for our understanding of morality in the context of waste and place, but it also depicts morality as a constructed through socio-spatial difference and inequality (2004, 8).

³ The term socio-spatial (*socio-spatiale*) or socio-territorial (*socio-territoriale*) inequality is commonly used by Tunisian academics and increasingly amongst NGOs and the media to talk about spatially-arranged socio-economic, but also ecological disparities in their country. Going back to the urban planner Amor Belhedi (1999) the term also historicises regional inequalities in development at least since colonial times. Finally, socio-spatial inequality here is often related to various forms of Tunisian regionalism.

rural poor reached the capital by the end of December, where union leaders and the National Order of Lawyers joined the protest, galvanising Tunisian elites across the cities of the Coast. The army was deployed in major cities to quell the growing protests, but on the 14th January 2011 Tunisia's military turned on Ben Ali's security forces, joined the demonstrators and thereby ended nearly six decades of authoritarian rule by ousting the dictator. Moral indignation and socio-spatial inequalities had converged to reconstitute political, spatial and moral orders. And the waste crisis was inserted into this socio-spatial reordering.

Mary Douglas (1966) demonstrated the moral dimensions of pollution; in her terms dirt was threatening to social and moral orders⁴. Although her work was not explicitly interested in the morality of place, her widely accepted definition of dirt, as “matter out of place” gave her analysis a distinctively spatial character that has been productively used by scholars to interrogate spatial practices and specifically spatial exclusion (Malkki 1995; Modan 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Sibley 1995). Cultural geographer David Sibley, who explicates how associations between morality and filth have been used to create ‘spaces of exclusion’ since antiquity, writes that ‘spatial boundaries are in part moral boundaries. Spatial separations symbolize a moral order as much in [...] closed suburban communities as in Douglas's tribal societies’ (1995, 35). An ascription of the moralising binary of clean and dirty then separates people and confines them to particular places, thereby creating and upholding particular socio-spatial orders that are maintained by the association between people, waste and morality (Alexander and Reno 2012; Creswell 1996; Dèurr and Jaffe 2012, 5). If these spatial borders are transgressed, thereby creating physical or symbolic pollution, the moral order is in peril. Looking at the mechanisms by which this link between people, waste, and place is forged, Emily McKee (2015) has recently coined the term “trash talk” to describe the discursive process by which people and the reportedly dirty places they inhabit are socially and morally assessed. “Trash talk” exemplifies what is here called “the idiom of pollution,” by which people and spaces are morally charged through discursive, spatial and material practices. Based on 15 months of research amongst Tunisians affected by the waste crisis in the capital, Tunis, conducted between 2012 and 2015, this article investigates the mechanisms and history of the moralisation of place through waste as both a symbolic and material category. Building on literature that emphasises the importance of space and place in the Arab Revolutions (Sadiki 2015; Sharp and Panetta 2016; Werbner et al. 2014) it is maintained that the idiom of pollution was employed in the creation of socio-spatial orders in Tunisia. It has thus also been integral to the socio-spatial order's potential demise. In the revolution and its aftermath, waste in the streets, emphasised socio-spatial stagnation and therefore rendered the revolution as a failure. An attention to waste in its various forms demonstrates the recursive relationship between materials, people, their thoughts and actions, in the moralisation of place. This recursive relationship allows each category involved in moralisation through the idiom of pollution—people, places and matter—to exude morally-polluting, or in Douglas' terms, dangerous qualities that threaten the moral order, dangers that are essential to revolutionary processes. While before the revolution waste was kept out of the most affluent areas, keeping them physically and morally clean, after the revolution waste

⁴ Douglas's works has been criticised for being too rigid in her opposition between order/ disorder, structure/ taboo (Meigs 1978) and for disregarding the material qualities of dirt (Hawkins 2006; Gregson et. al. 2010).

was everywhere, threatening to morally pollute the country as a whole and even the revolution itself.

The Clean and the Dirty in the Making of Modern Tunisia

Tunisia's moral geography of waste emerged in the relationship to racial politics of France's colonisation. As the 19th century drew to a close in late-Ottoman Tunisia, a new conception of the city arose. Influenced by the hygiene campaigns of large European metropolises such as London and Paris, European emissaries and Ottoman elites started to frame the urban masses in terms of filth, infectious disease and disorder, a threat that required hygienic intervention to control urban space and the "dangerous classes" within it (Ouled-Mohammed 1977, 56). Ann Stoler (1995, 7) has shown how class politics in 19th century Europe were deeply integrated with the racial politics and language that served as social distinctions within the colonies. In discussing the emergence of modern London, Stallybrass and White (1986) demonstrated how the association of the lumpenproletariat with filth, dirt and waste was central to bourgeois anxieties in the emergence of the modern city in 19th and 20th century Europe. Here the couplets of clean/dirty, high/low were transcoded onto the different yet interconnected realms of the psyche, the body, the social order and urban space. This created a "metonymic" and eventually moralised association of "physical and moral hygiene" (1986, 143), linking the lumpenproletariat, the slum, and the unconscious, with the lower, shameful, regions of the body and human excrement—all aspects that the bourgeoisie tried to suppress and control through physical and social engineering. In Paris, the miasma theory, the idea that diseases were transmitted through bad odours linked the urban masses with danger and epidemic and set them off against the "deodorized bourgeoisie" (Corbin 1986, 55) in the context of a growing class divide in French society. The resultant Pasteurization of France through the Hygiene Movement (Latour 1988), which practiced a "mixture of urbanism, consumer protection, ecology...defense of the environment, and moralization" (1988, 23) targeted the urban masses with a social engineering project of "gigantic proportions" (1988, 24) that moralised filth and the urban poor. In Tunisia, the cholera outbreaks of 1849 and 1867 turned novel concerns with the poor into moral panics that affected the reorganisation of urban centers. In fact, the epidemic of 1849 resulted in the first-time removal of the head of state Ahmed Bey from the Arab medina, where he lived alongside the urban poor, to the suburb of Carthage on the advice of his European physicians (Gallagher 1983, 46-50). Under European rule hygienic intervention started to moralise the poor and urban space through a vernacular of clean and dirty.

Public hygiene as a moralising science was imperative to the civilising missions of colonial Europe across Africa (Burke 1996; McClintock 1995; Warwick 1995)⁵. Here sanitary intervention was a tool of governance that allowed colonisers to confine populations to particular spaces (Masquelier 2005, 7). In neighbouring Algeria, the French used access to sanitation as a spatial marker for modernity, by which Algerian cities and suburbs came to be

⁵ This European moralising discourse expressed through the new conceptions of hygiene fell on fertile grounds in an Ottoman/ Islamic context that already conflated dirt with moral indecency and danger (Boudhiba 1998) and where urban elites had a longstanding suspicion of rural populations (Vasile 1995).

classified as European and modern or African and backward based on their sanitary infrastructure and the perceived cleanliness of their populations (Brock 2010). In Tunis, while public hygiene campaigns initially did little to improve the sanitary conditions of the general population, they resulted in a socio-spatial reorganisation (Vasile 1995, 67). The primary mechanism for this intervention was the creation of Tunisia's first municipality in the city of Tunis in 1859 and then after the French protectorate was established in 1881 the creation of the *Conseil Centrale de Hygiène et de Santé Publique* in 1889. These new public health and waste management institutions oversaw the creation of the *Ville Nouvelle* in the 1880s, a new city that was built exclusively for the coloniser outside of the walls of the original Arab medina of Tunis, so that the French could escape the perceived unsanitary conditions of the Arabs.

The *Ville Nouvelle* transformed Tunis into what architect Massimo Amodè (1985) called a “two partite,” a dualistic urban structure that separated coloniser and colonised, which was partly justified by hygienic difference and the presence or absence of waste. Besides modern underground sewers, the *Ville Nouvelle* had a new water supply and even electricity after the development of a power station in the harbour of La Goulette in 1908. Thus wrote the Resident General of Tunis, Resident S. Pichon, in a letter to the President in France in 1906 upon the near completion of the *Ville Nouvelle*: ‘Certainly, that anyone who lays eyes on Tunis after the French occupation, sees that what was yesterday still in a pestilential swamp, was now purified and sanitized’ (Quoted in Barthel 2003, 42; *my translation*). The creation of the *Ville Nouvelle* was therefore emblematic of the spatial organisation of the new Tunisian city and it was in part predicated on the duality between dirty Arabs and clean Europeans each confined to a particular position in society, space and within the moral order.

In the 1930s, a large rural exodus perpetuated by the mechanisation of agriculture and the increased dispossession of the peasantry by colonisers to the backdrop of the Great Recession (Chabbi 1986) drove rural populations in large numbers into the cities of the Sahel (coastal region), where they could find neither employment nor accommodation. This rural influx led to the creation of the *gourbivilles*, semi-urban hamlets composed of mud huts and tents erected on vacant land and garbage dumps (Perkins 2004, 93-94). Unlike in other North African cities, the *gourbivilles* were not constructed of scavenged building materials, but of soil and actual dirt, in part explaining the “metonymic relationship” between physical and symbolic dirt. In the capital Tunis many *gourbivilles* were directly adjacent to more affluent areas (Micaud 1976, 150), creating stark socio-spatial inequalities between contiguous neighbourhoods. The *gourbis*, the inhabitants of these ruralised slums, were prohibited from taking up the traditional occupations of the urban population and thereby filtered into an informal economy of rag picking, servant hood and illicit activities (Perkins 2004). Devoid of sanitary facilities, medical services, and employment opportunities the *gourbivilles* then raised the “twin specters of epidemic and revolution” (2004, 94). Forming the ultimate dirty, rural, diseased and dangerous counter space to the modern *Nouvelle Ville* in the eyes of the French (Vasile 1995, 76), the *gourbivilles* further incited the anxieties of the urban bourgeoisie and calcified the moral geography of the modern Tunis. While this geography solidified at certain points in history, many neighbourhoods, like the medina of Tunis, were always socio-economically diverse and mixed newly rural arrivals with ancestral urbanites

(Bachrouh 2008). After Tunisia's independence from France, the whole of the Nouvelle Ville lay abandoned and upper-class Tunisians primarily from the Arab medina moved into the European homes, starting a chain reaction that shuffled populations around the city and the most affluent city dwellers eventually into the Eastern suburbs of Carthage and Gammarth.

After independence from France in 1956, Habib Bouguiba, a zealous moderniser and first president of the republic, intensified French sanitary policies and their associated socio-spatial reorganisation. Reshaping Tunisia's moral order was central to his mission, which required the refashioning of the Tunisian citizen to drive out anything that Bourguiba deemed archaic (Ben Achour 1987). His prime post-independence policy of national integration required the inclusion of some communities into the new image of the Tunisian nation and the exclusion or interpolation of others. Like that of the French, his modernist ideology conflated the city (*bedawi*) with order, progress, modernity, which presented his national ideal, and the country (*beldi*) with disorder and barbarity (Boudhiba 1973)⁶. Tunis as the capital became a microcosm of the new nation-building project (Vasile 1995), and the *gourbivilles*⁷ were all too rural, dirty and disordered enclaves in the modern Tunisian city. Bourguibists, who had their political power base in the cities of the coastal regions, saw rural populations, and particularly poor rural populations in the *gourbivilles*, as a threat to their rule (Vasile 1995) and needed to dismantle the *gourbivilles* displacing its populations or integrating them into the fabric of Tunisian urban life as slums (Sethom 1995). The moral geography of waste in Tunis is a remnant of early 19th-century social engineering campaigns in the emergence of the modern city that tried to confine certain populations to certain “spaces of exclusion” (Sibley 1995) through a morally-charged vernacular of clean and dirty. Starting in the late 1970s neoliberal economic policies increasingly translated into neoliberal urban planning policies (or the lack thereof) that furthered the marginalisation of the former *gourbivilles* and added a new kind of urban periphery to the mosaic of Tunis. Neoliberal *laissez-faire* politics in urban planning terms meant a move away from the bulldozer policies of *degourbification* to a tacit acceptance of increasing unplanned urban sprawl in the west and north of the city. While much has changed, many of these areas and other urban ghettos that have developed since are still without access to sanitation, proper roads or waste management infrastructure. Many *gourbivilles* in Tunis, especially around Jebel L’Ahmar, Mellassine and Saida El-Manoubia, are still considered to be morally-suspect places that give rise to morally-suspect people.

Moral Geographies of Dirt in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

Miriam taught yoga classes to foreign aid workers and cosmopolitan Tunisians from the basement of her villa in the upmarket neighbourhood of Carthage, a suburb of Tunisia's capital Tunis. In her sixties, she exuded the tranquillity of a yogi and the matriarchal authority as head of her family in equal measure. French is a marker of class and education in

⁶ Until recently government documents used the term *naari*⁷ (Internal migrator) a derogatory expression for rural migrants to the cities.

⁷ By 1966, two thirds of Tunis's population lived either in the medina or the *gourbivilles* (Micaud 1976, 138).

Tunisia; her classes were exclusively francophone intercepted by the occasional Hindi chant. After we had exchanged formalities, she asked what neighbourhood I lived in. ‘Marsa Ville’, I responded. Like Carthage, Marsa is one of the affluent Eastern suburbs of Tunis, but Marsa Ville still retained a more popular feel to it, as it was originally a fishing village that had been swallowed up by the expanding capital. "Marsa is pretty," Miriam said, "a clean neighbourhood"—here she made an exception and used the Arabic word for clean (*nthif*). With some deference, I replied, "but your neighbourhood Carthage is far more beautiful", thinking “clean” was a euphemism for aesthetics. She said, "Yes, it is much cleaner (*anthaf*)". “Carthage is one of the nicest neighbourhoods in Tunis”, I replied again adhering to the etiquette of exchanging niceties at the start of a conversation. With some fervour, she replied “No, Gammarth is clearly the cleanest. Carthage is clean, but Gammarth is the cleanest [neighbourhood] of them all”. At the time, this interaction puzzled me. Why was a conversation about my residence led in a vernacular of cleanliness?

It was clear that she was not exclusively referring to the physical state of these neighbourhoods, even in the face of the waste crisis. In part, Miriam’s assessments of place were clearly socio-economic, as regions of both Carthage and Gammarth are some of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the whole of Tunisia. Both are homes to presidential palaces, as well as many embassies and tourist resorts, but cleanliness meant even more to her. As I found out, clean areas were of course juxtaposed with dirty areas, expressing a geography that divided the city and country as a whole into ‘the clean’ and ‘the dirty’, a geography that was a moral assessment of place, which most Tunisians carried in their heads and could readily recount with great consensus. Within this assessment, clean areas were often physically cleaner, with more affluent municipalities delivering better services through a more sophisticated waste disposal infrastructure. Sewage treatment plants, the often-open air canals that feed them, landfills or waste distribution stations were primarily located in “dirty areas”.⁸ Dirty areas then designated places that are physically more polluted, with lower rates of trash collection and access to sanitation, zigzagged by dirt roads that spur up clouds of dust with every passing car in summer and turn into mud paths in the winter. Physical dirt within these spaces was then moralised by correlating waste with disease, higher crime rates⁹ and a general sense of moral corruption. This geography of clean and dirty was primarily a moral geography that incorporated materials and people into the moralisation of place.

The particular mechanics of this causation between dirt, people, their thoughts, actions and the places they inhabit was most aptly explained to me by Mohamed, a taxi driver from a popular Tunis neighbourhood of Hay al-Zuhur. Using a Libyan client he met the day before as an example, he explained that a clean person is decent, has a good mind (literally clean minded, *aa’d nathif*, in Tunisian Arabic) and good intentions. . Expanding this moral

⁸ There is a large and varied body of literature on the distribution of waste management infrastructure and social marginalisation. See Rootes (2009) for an introduction.

⁹ For Tunisians, the negative conflation between morality and place is based in part on the perceived criminal and transgressive behaviors of the inhabitants of “dirty places” —i.e. dirty places produce dirty people. The work of Sally Engle Merry (1981) however, disproves this association between dirty areas and crime in her ethnography of a Boston housing project. Here residents also perceived a run down, dirty, place — in her cases a decrepit playground — as the most dangerous part of their area. These perceptions didn't hold against crime statistics that Merry consulted. Crime statistics, as most statistics with political currency, are famously unreliable in Tunisia.

geography beyond the borders of Tunisia, Mohamed said his Libyan client was decent, as he came to Tunisia with good intentions, to make investments and not spend his money on girls, nightclubs and alcohol, as is the typical stereotype of Libyans in Tunisia¹⁰. He insisted, therefore, dirty places do not always produce dirty people. He went on to explain that when you go to a popular neighbourhood (i.e., dirty neighbourhood) for example, Hay el-Noor or Hay el-Saida, you will find people who are decent (clean-minded), have good intentions but are still judged as filthy and morally corrupted. Individuals who try to thrive—who study, for example—could become clean-minded despite the dirty places they inhabit, he insisted. Mohamed then used an exception to illustrate the rule: dirty areas, produce dirty people and dirty people live in dirty areas, thereby linking people, morality and place through the vernacular and material practices of waste. However, he would not go as far as to say that clean areas produce decent people, which might have to do with the post-revolutionary climate in which he was speaking. The broad-scale revelations about corruption and torture, which the media also labelled as dirty, were supposedly carried out and ordered by exactly those people who lived in the “cleanest areas” of Carthage or Gammarth.

One way to think about this moralisation of place through the conflation of dirt and people is through the conundrum of the homeless. In Tunis, as elsewhere, the homeless are kept out of the most affluent areas; police round them up, especially in the center of the city around Avenue Habib Bouguiba. The homeless are not allowed to inhabit clean spaces and when they repeatedly do so these spaces are threatened with pollution. They are considered to become dirty and unsuitable for decent people. Simultaneously, it is the association with unclean places, as well as the absence of access to sanitary facilities that render the homeless person dirty in the first place. This relationship then expresses an intrinsic quality of both physical and moralised dirt: unlike cleanliness, it sullies. By this logic, dirt, whether that of people or areas, whether physical or moral, has the power to pollute. Morally corrupted people will produce physically and morally corrupted areas and vice-versa, producing a recursive relationship between dirt, morality and people in Tunisia that is mapped onto the city and country, dividing it into the clean and the dirty, the decent and indecent in the moralisation of place.

Moral Pollution of Place and Time in the Revolution

The protests of the revolution translated moral indignation into a spatial practice through the occupation and reclamation of public space from the regime. As Lina Khatib wrote about Egypt's revolution, Cairo's Tahrir Square became a “mini cosmos of the country's moral order as expressed in spatial order” (2013, 149), a spatial order that always finds expression in the particular spatial symbolism of a society (Khatib 2013, 149 quoting Mills 1993). Waste, and specifically clean-up practices that symbolically rid the space of the former regime, figured centrally into the moral and spatial reimagining of Egypt (Winegar 2012, 33). In Tunisia, the revolution and its aftermath made the moral geography of waste described

¹⁰ Muhawi (1996) writes that the negative stereotypes of Libyans in Tunisia have their origin in the economic inequality of the two countries because of Libya's oil and the expulsion of Tunisian workers from the oil industry in the 1970s.

above visible through a continuous garbage crisis. Waste flooded the country for years after the ousting of the dictator, symbolising social and spatial stagnation rather than the socio-spatial reorganisation the revolution had promised.

After the fall of Ben Ali on January 14th 2011, one of the first groups to make use of the newly found political freedoms were municipal garbage workers, who in a general strike demanded better pay and working conditions. Almost immediately, all major cities were flooded with loosely sealed red, black and blue garbage bags as waste spilled indiscriminately into the public arena. Illegal dumps sprang up wherever they could not be prevented, and waste distribution stations, often centrally located in residential areas, turned into the final resting places for consumed goods. Quickly, the garbage crisis turned into a general waste crisis that revealed a decrepit waste management system that had been hidden by Tunisia's dictatorships for decades (Darwish 2017). During the Transition, as the state was weak, strikes were ongoing, municipalities struggled to deliver services and serve as a watchdog, large-scale dumping of household and eventually industrial waste and sewage was ubiquitous. To add to that, in an attempt to avoid red tape and fees for permits, an illegal building frenzy erupted across the country that added second stories and extensions to houses and as an effect covered Tunisia in discarded building materials. Waste was everywhere, not only piling up in streets or running in the rivers but it appeared in song lyrics and in everyday language revealing a moral assessment of a new era, an assessment that was primarily negative and in part defined by waste.

The phrase *balad al-zibleh* (country of rubbish) was employed in discussions about corruption, traffic, and the seemingly slow pace of political transition. Garbage became a metaphor for everything that was perceived to be wrong with Tunisia during the Transition. On Facebook, first the garbage selfie and then the garbage-bucket challenge, mirroring the global meme of the ice-bucket challenge, expressed citizens' outcries¹¹.

“Since Labib is dead, the whole country stinks of shit,” Bassem declared. We were driving from the highway into central Tunis talking about what the revolution had done for him when a strong whiff of the familiar stink of sewage caught our car. Originally from Kairouan, he was part of social group that has been epitomised in the revolution: young, educated—he was training to become an architect—in a job without much of a future, as he put it, multi-lingual, hungry for change or ready to leave for Europe or the US. He was skeptical of the gains of the revolution, anxious sometimes and always frustrated. The problem with revolutions is that they embody exactly a young energy, a fiery desire for instant change. Nobody ever chants “patience, patience, patience...” in the streets when the dictator is toppled. But the reality of the revolution is that its outcomes are unpredictable, that its gains might not be realised for decades, if at all. In this way, revolutions are intrinsically anti-climactic, tantalising even, dangling the fruits of change over revolutionary heads, promising the long-desired reordering of society without ever guaranteeing to satiate that hunger. And that, in Tunisia at least, under the constant threat of chaos and reversal and most importantly: definite uncertainty. As the Transition dragged on, in many Tunisians' interpretation the revolution didn't deliver. Yes,

¹¹ This use of garbage in a productive form of protest is in line with what several scholars have described as the material politics of waste, in which the either waste's abject nature or its indefinability gives rise to a politics of waste (Hawkins 2004; Moore 2012).

one of the most progressive constitutions in the world were forged collaboratively, but the jobs didn't materialise, in fact they dissipated, especially in the Tourist industry that had been struck by two terrorists attacks in early 2014. Bassem and many others like him felt socially, economically and spatially stuck—as the many migrants that left on the perilous Mediterranean journey to Europe attest to—they were stuck in a country flooded with waste.

Eventually this moral assessment of the post-revolutionary era was iconified in Hamzaoui Med Amine and Kafon's post-revolutionary hymn *Houmani* (a person living in a popular neighbourhood)—a dirty person from a dirty neighbourhood in the moral geography of waste. The most famous song lyric, booming from car radios and shops during the transition, hummed along by Tunisians of all backgrounds was: “*Ga'din n'ichou kizible fi poubela; ti fagri negri mangoum bikri ma na'aref mougella...*” (Here we are living like rubbish in the rubbish bin; I am so poor I don't rise early or care about time...). In an interview with a Tunisian newspaper, Med Amine, who designates himself as a Houmani, originating from the popular Tunis neighbourhood of Ariana, describes his neologism as “this is the guy who has no means of escape, who is stuck in the neighbourhood” (Auffrey 2013), like rubbish in the rubbish bin. The song is not purely a moral lament, it is also about solidarity amongst people of the *houma* (popular neighbourhood), but what it brought to the fore was hopeless self-assessment of those living in these neighbourhoods expressed through an everyday material reality for those people, that of waste. It used waste and the very same spatial categories of its moral geography to express the socio-spatial stagnation after the revolution, as in post-revolutionary Tunisia, Tunisians did not move spatially or socio-economically, at least not yet. While metaphorical waste attached to the poor was immobile, actual waste was everywhere. The very recursive relationship between people and matter that allowed for the moralisation of place through a metonymic association was now turned on its head through the waste crisis. Wasted matter, not people, was out of place. Material waste washed out social and spatial separations between the clean and the dirty; it ruptured the moral geography of waste, and turned the whole of Tunisia into a morally suspicious landscape. In other words, the very moral geography that was based on metonymic connections between material waste, the poor, and moral corruption, now turned the post-revolutionary landscape into morally corrupted landscape through the garbage crisis. Rather than containing morally corrupted people into particular places alone—although this was still the case—morally corrupted matter spilled into the streets and polluted all spaces and with it the revolution itself.

The transitional government, aware of this sentiment, started a national cleaning campaign in early 2015. Posters, depicting a smiley cartoon garbage can, appeared across the capital with the caption; “Nothing lasts forever, but hopefully (in the power of god or will of god), tomorrow will be better than today...” This spin on a common Tunisian expression, namely nothing last forever but god, meant to say that these post-revolutionary times are dirty, but god-willing this period will be over soon when we liberate the city and country from all this waste. This campaign then moves the temporal dimension in the moral geography of waste into focus. Waste polluted not only people, streets, areas, neighbourhoods and cities morally, it transgressed to incorporate the whole of the post-revolutionary period in its moral assessment through waste. As Paul Watt (2004, 85) notes, “To understand the significance of

urban place images and the intertwining of physical dirt with social disorder, we must introduce a temporal as well as spatial dimension into the analysis. Place images are not fixed but can change their meaning over time.” Similarly to the Tunisian case, in his field site the narratives of his informants focus on a “breakdown of previous moral social order” (2004, 86) and he reads them through a shift of the physical environment from clean to dirty. Waste and its spatio-temporal character epitomised the moral assessment of the Transition and to some degree hindered a full transformation of Tunisia’s moral economy after the revolution.

Conclusion

Writing about the revolution in Egypt, Lina Khatib noted that a society’s moral order is always expressed in its spatial, through the particular local vernacular that this spatial order is represented in (Mills 1993 quoted in Khatib 2013, 149). In Tunisia, the moralisation of dirt is a powerful tool in the demarcation of society, in which the metonymic connection between waste, dirty people and areas allows for the establishment of socio-spatial divisions on the bases of morality. During Tunisia’s late colonial period, this moral geography of waste, epitomised in the juxtaposition between the French Quarters and the *gourbivilles*, contributed to the containment of the colonised in the modern Tunisian city. Here the spatial containment of supposedly morally corrupted people in morally corrupted spaces held up the racist social order of the colony. This moral geography, though in an altered state, remained and influenced experiences and readings of the revolution in Tunisia. While in the 19th and early 20th century it was movements of “dirty people” that threatened to destabilise the moral geographies of waste in Tunisia, in post-revolutionary Tunisia, there were no such movements. In fact, the post-revolutionary period was defined by a socio-spatial stagnation broken only by a desperate flight of migrants across the Mediterranean. The moral geography of waste and therefore Tunisia’s moral order was threatened by ubiquity of physical waste through the garbage crisis. The very same moral metonymic connection between waste, people, and place that had allowed for the control of populations was now turned on its head and morally polluting matter spilled across the boundaries of Tunisia’s moral geography. This spill of waste into formerly “clean areas” threatened to morally and socially pollute them. Physical waste through its moralisation and association with the poor came to define the very temporality of the revolution, turning the country during the Transition into a country of rubbish that was morally suspect and stagnant.

What does Tunisia’s moral geography of waste then tell us about the moral imperatives and practices that emerge from, or else inform, the diverse articulations of land in the contemporary world? What are the moral dimensions of human roles in relation to land and place? Tunisia’s waste crisis, its insertion into a moral geography predicated on the “clean” and “dirty” and historical contextualisation inherently demonstrates the dynamic nature of the morality of space and place. It depicts the morality of place as a historically contingent amalgamate of moralised ideas about cleanliness embedded in a recursive and dynamic relationship between people, interpretation of their thoughts and actions, materials and places. Waste depicts the morality of place as a site of social and material struggle; it reveals its role in the maintenance of the social order and demonstrates that the language and imagery with

which the morality of place is maintained can shape the way its potential demise is perceived. Finally, the boundaries of moral pollution are porous and under certain circumstances don't just sully people and places, but even whole time periods and political movements.

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